

This chapter is an unpublished manuscript written by Bj Richards which will appear in the revision of the Anti-Bias Curriculum, by Louise Derman-Sparks.

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ANTI-BIAS EDUCATION IN A FAMILY CHILD CARE HOME

Bj Richards

The cultural, linguistic and economic diversity of our profession and of the children and families we serve is respected and celebrated by providers and other early childhood support agencies & by the policy makers, whose decisions determine what resources are available to us. ⁱ

I have been working with young children for thirty years, the last eighteen doing family child care in my home. At first, I focused on providing quality child care, not yet realizing that this includes multi-cultural issues. A wise parent of a toddler son brought this to my attention. Looking through the few books, which came from friends, yard sales and resale shops, she asked me what I thought about the importance of children's books reflecting the diversity of the world, including females in positive, active roles. That afternoon was a turning point in my life as my anti-bias education began.

I looked at every material and activity through my new anti-bias lens. I began reading everything I could find and attended workshops about how to counter the impact of racism and sexism on young children. I also worked to unlearn stereotypes with which I had grown up. For example, I thought about my interactions with girls

and boys, and I would catch myself warning girls to be careful when using outdoor equipment while allowing the boys to stretch their exploration. My attitudes and behaviors did not change overnight - it took effort.

I concluded that our world would be a better place if all children grew up in anti-bias homes and child care settings. I realized that as a family child care provider, I have a tremendous influence on how children will grow up approaching the "bigger world."

Bj's GOALS

Children must feel safe, loved, and nurtured to develop the basic trust they need for healthy development. I want children to:

1. Develop positive gender, racial, cultural, class, and individual identities
2. Be able to identify and express their needs, develop coping skills, and feel competent Be healthy and appreciate their bodies
3. Love learning, be a problem-solver and a decision-maker
4. Develop the skills to include and cooperate with others across all differences
5. Be able to appreciate the good and recognize the unjust
6. Become autonomous, creative, critical thinkers and activists in their social environments

PROVIDE DIVERSE, ANTI-BIAS MATERIALS

In the beginning it took time for me to think about and find the materials I needed to meet my goals for the children. Today, it's a lot easier to find excellent materials for creating an anti-bias family child care home. Catalogs and the internet can bring almost anything into our homes.

Books: These are my most important tool for creating an anti-bias environment, while also introducing children to the love of reading. Books concretely introduce children to differences and similarities of all kinds among themselves and in their larger communities-- even for children who are not living in a diverse community. Books are my biggest investment. I have gradually acquired them from yard sales, books stores, resale shops, discount stores, the internet, friends, parents, and of course, the library. I will also read books the children bring in, which do not meet my criteria in other ways. However, I use them to help the children become critical thinkers. I may comment that I wish the illustrator would have included children with brown skin or painted the girls climbing trees too. I also may change the "I for Indian" in alphabet books to "I is for ice cream or icicle", with an explanation why I am doing so.

Music: I gather a diverse selection of CDs reflecting the children's home cultures and languages, as well as the cultures and languages in the larger community, country, and other countries. I work to include songs about fairness and many kinds of diversity. If family members make music themselves, we tape them and play them in our FCCH.

DVDs: Since I work alone, I use a DVD each day while I am preparing lunch and at other times when I need the children to be both contained and entertained. I choose ones with quality children's stories that include diversity of population and languages and I include DVD's of good children's performers who use songs from different cultures.

Dolls: Over time, I've collected a wide-range of authentic-as-possible looking dolls, with various skin colors and hair, and clothes of both genders. Homemade dolls also work as long as they do not look stereotypical of any group.

Dress Up: The families have helped me to gather a wide grange of types of clothes used at home, at work and for recreation; male and female; from the children's families' cultures. We also collect tools used at work and at home: hard hats toy tools, brief cases, small suitcases, medical kit, grocery store prop box, keyboards, snuglies, card board boxes, a steering wheel, etc.

Play Food And Kitchen Tools: It's important to include cooking tools from your children's families. We gather empty food cans and boxes with different languages. Plastic foods from all cultures are now available online or in school supply catalogs.

Puzzles: I try to select ones with a range of diverse men and women in all kinds of roles. I've learned to make my own puzzles using magazine photos or my own photos of the children and their families. (See chapter 3 for how to do this).

Paints, Felt Pens, Crayons, Paper: You want a range of skin tones, as well as primary colors. Offer black and brown as part of regular art and craft materials, not just for special use. (If a child thinks those colors are "yucky," I use them myself and talk about how I think the colors are beautiful)

Block People: Most school supply catalogs now carry a wide range of people of all ages, races and body types, including people with physical challenges.

Blocks & Legos: These are essential materials. They offer the same open-ended activities for boys and girls if you take them out of the boxes in which they are sold (which are very sexist in color and messages). Legos also offers a multi-cultural set of *Lego* people.

Wall Hangings: I always add some posters, paintings, fabrics and other art items reflecting the children's home cultures to the ones I already have in my home.

STRATEGIES

Much of the anti-bias education I do revolves around daily interactions with my children. I have also created specific activities to focus on diversity and fairness issues.

Use Anti-Bias Language in All Interactions and Activities.

I will never forget the workshop where I learned how racist our language could be. One example is that negative/bad things tend to be called "black" and positive/good things are "white." For example, the good boys wear white; the bad ones wear black; a "white" lie is not as serious as other lies. I also learned to use terms to describe *either* a female or male such as firefighter, police officer, cowpoke or cowhand, worker, server, flight attendant. This life long process began thirty years ago and I am learning every day!

Support Discussion of People's Attributes.

My children often ask questions while I am reading stories, or at the lunch table. For example, I recently enrolled a two year old girl and soon after she started, Elijah who is European-American and 3, says "Claire has beige skin like me. Rahsaan has dark brown skin, Nya, Shane and Remi are light brown and Isabel is medium brown." He was comfortable enough to voice his observation because we had talked about skin color many times before. I let my children know that they may talk about all of the

differences they observe. I regularly open up conversations about children's various attributes (e.g., skin color eye shape, gender anatomy, living aids). I answer all questions about personal differences accurately (or as accurately as I can) and matter-of-factly.

I have a doll wheelchair, hearing aids and glasses on hand for when the topic comes up and when I want to introduce people living with physical challenges. I use a diverse set of block people for storytelling to help the children understand how people feel if someone makes fun of whom they are. I make a hair chart by snipping a tiny piece of hair from each child (with their family's permission) and gluing them on a cardboard. We then talk about the differences in colors, texture, curly or straight, etc. I have a few books about hair to bring out whenever this topic comes up, or when we have our hair salon prop box in the dress up area.

Encourage children to express their emotions and their ideas.

If there is a conflict among the children or if someone is not participating in clean up and the others feel it is not fair, I use dolls to tell the story and ask the kids how we can solve this problem. They are full of ideas and we choose one to try in our own group. We read many books about feelings and we play games making faces of different emotions. I often give them the word for the emotion I think they are feeling, such as "frustration", and sooner or later you will hear a three year old shout "I am so frustrated!" instead of throwing a tantrum. I encourage both girls and boys to feel their anger and express it appropriately. I ask the children for their opinions as often as I can as a way of helping them learn everyone has ideas. We may agree and we may disagree: both are O.K.

Never Allow Personal Attributes To Be A Reason For Exclusion Or Limiting Children.

Whenever a child excuses another child because of who she or he is (for example, a game is "just for girls"), I always intervene. I first try to decipher what the real issue is and go from there. If, upon talking with the children, I affirm that they are really excluding the child because he is a boy, I ask the girls to think of a role for the boys, so everyone can play. If the girls are using that phrase as a way of saying, "we want to play by ourselves," I will tell them to use the correct words to express that desire instead of telling the boys they cannot play because they are not girls. In some situations, I respect the children's choices of playmates.

Help Children to Try All Activities, Noisy or Quiet, Neat or Messy.

I encourage everyone to play with dolls, blocks, dress up, cars and trains. If I begin playing with blocks, the girls will gravitate to the block corner and become more familiar with them. The same happens with trains and the vehicles. I play a game where everyone chooses a doll and we create all kinds of families and role-playing. This helps the boys experience doll play.

Teach Children to Recognize Stereotypes

Each year, as Halloween and Thanksgiving approach, I raise the topic of Native Americans. Here is an example of one such conversation:

I asked the children if they had ever heard of Indians. Three children said they had not. I explained that some people use the word Indian but they are Native Americans and they are a group of people living in this country. I also told them that Native Americans were here first, but that is the only historical information I give them at this stage of the discussion. Elijah immediately asked me, "What color skin do they have?" I said it was very interesting because they do not all have the same color-some Native people have light brown, some little darker and some may have very dark skin. That was the end of the conversation.

The following day, as I was reading a book about Halloween, which showed a parade of children in various costumes, I pointed to the one child dressed in a feather and headband. I explained this child was dressing up to be a Native American - one of the people I had told them about the day before. I told them this was unfair to Native people and their ears perked up at the word "unfair." I explained that only Native Americans could be Native Americans, but that anyone can dress up to be a doctor, a firefighter, a police officer, an animal, a dancer, a princess, a super hero and all of the other costumes on parade in the book. I told them it would hurt Native peoples' feelings to see other people pretending to be a Native American. That was the end of the discussion. I had no idea what they understood, if anything.

Two days later I saw Isabel (four and a half) looking at the book by herself sitting on the sofa. When she got to the page we had discussed, she called me over and pointed to the child in the feather and headband. She looked at me and shook her head and said "Uh oh. They can pretend they are ..." and she listed all of the other costumes but not this one. "It's not fair." I agreed with her and I showed her a book about a Native American boy living in today's world. I said he would be unhappy to see that child in our Halloween book. I am not sure exactly how well she understands this stereotype but the seed is planted, there will be more questions, more spotting of stereotypes, and I will provide her with more positive examples of Native people. It is a beginning. I want the children to feel comfortable to talk about their ideas, so I can help them unlearn stereotypes they have learned. It is an ongoing dialog.

Handle Toileting and Diapering Routines without Any Expression of Shame.

I always have children in diapers or who are beginning toilet learning, so the topic of who has a vagina and who has a penis regularly comes up. The children make observations, ask questions, and I provide simple, honest responses, using these times for simple and honest discussions of body parts and functions. They often begin the process of "potty" training by going into the bathroom together to sit side by side on potty chairs, but soon want privacy and I respect this. Elijah (three and a half) came to me this week and said, "Bj, I have big news and you are going to freak out when I tell you!" "What is it," I asked eagerly. "I now pee standing up like a big boy!" The other children were eager to observe this new milestone and Elijah obliged.

Using Holiday Traditions & Celebrations.

Other providers often ask if I celebrate holidays in my anti-bias program. I do. However, because we honor and explore diversity throughout the year, I do not use holidays in a "tourist curriculum" way.

Holidays celebrating social justice: International Women's Day and Dr.

Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birthday

Each year, on March 8, I display a huge framed photo collage that includes women in non-traditional roles and significant women in the lives of the children whom I have cared for over the years (immediate family and relatives, family friends, previous child care providers, etc.). I want the children to see their moms as women who contribute to the world, so I add new faces each year. Last year we made a book with each family having their own 8 x 11-page collage about the women in their child's lives. The book became part of our collection.

I remain open on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday. Older siblings of my current children and some of my alumni, come to the house. We make a chain of cutout

hands using skin-tone paper. We bake a cake and sing a song that four of my day care children made up many years ago:

"We baked a cake, we blew it out
Happy Birthday Martin Luther King, we shout
'I have a dream', he said; 'People hand in hand'
Working and singing throughout the land".

We also sing Stevie Wonder's Happy Birthday, composed for Dr. King's birthday first official celebration. I set up a Martin Luther King plastic doll (7 in. high) behind a "podium" on a Lego-made stage on my fireplace mantel. I arrange all of the Lego and block people (all races, ages and abilities) as if they are listening to Dr. King speak. Each day I take one of the people down and tell the kids a story about what brought this person to the speech. The children love and eagerly await the stories. We read several books about Martin Luther King and the people who helped him "change the rules," because he wanted them to be fair.

These are concepts most of the children understand. While the youngest care only observers, they become familiar with Dr. King's name and the songs we sing. The following year they understand more, and so on. By the time the children leave my program for kindergarten, they are experts and often share their knowledge and the birthday song with their new teacher and classmates.

Children's family traditions

I invite parents/grandparents into my home to share stories about how they celebrate their holidays. One grandfather, born in Belfast, Ireland, visited every St. Patrick's Day with Irish soda bread, stories and a song or two. I also have several children adopted from China, so we celebrate their New Year holiday. Each year I add a few more decorations to my Chinese New Year's box--many of them given to me by the families. A dad, born in China, cooks lunch for us and shares stories of his own childhood's celebrations. All of the families meet at a restaurant in Chinatown on

a Sunday morning in February for Dim Sum. We bring along a large silk Chinese Dragon and the children gather underneath to walk around the restaurant performing an impromptu dragon dance to music. We walk around Chinatown looking in stores, and playing in a community playground after we have eaten. This is an event that families look forward to each year. Alumni families also join us.

December holidays

This is my home, so I do my family's Christmas traditions. I have a Black Santa collection, which lines my mantel and bookshelves. The collection has expanded to include Santas from all over the world given to me by alumni families and friends. I have a very diverse collection of ornaments from around the world. I also display a Menorah, a Kinera and books about all of the winter holidays so the children are familiar with all of them. I explain that some families celebrate Christmas, others celebrate Chanukah, some families celebrate Kwanzaa and many people in the world do not celebrate any holidays. I want them to be aware that some children do not celebrate Halloween or other holidays for religious reasons.

Partnering With Families

Providers often ask me if I have difficulty with parents who do not share my ideas about anti-bias education. I learned long ago to describe my philosophy in detail in my Parent Handbook. I ask every prospective family to please read it before they come for an interview. If they are still interested, we set up an evening meeting. I answer their questions and ask questions of them. If both the family and I believe we may be a good match, we set up a day- time visit to see the program in practice. When families enroll, they sign a contract that includes a statement that they have read the Parent Handbook. I am very fortunate that most of my families choose to come here because of my anti-bias program.

I think family child care becomes a second home and family to the children, which also makes it possible to create a community among their families. I work very hard to foster this by encouraging the parents to share child care with each other. I have a few potlucks each year, an annual circus day, outdoor art day, a holiday gathering, Chinese New Year's celebration. We often attend local children's concerts together as a group.

I am in daily contact with my families through email. I write a description of our day about what we did and anecdotes about the children. I also use this opportunity to explain why I initiate certain activities or topics. I often include photos to brighten their day at work. The families look forward to these daily updates and many print them for their child to read someday. In addition to daily group emails, every few weeks I also try to write to each family about their child's development.

Before I had a computer, I wrote about each child's day in a private section of a three ring binder, which parents read at pickup. I usually do my writing during naptime. It is worth the effort and the time it takes. Families feel in the loop, and can use the information about the day to answer their child's questions and engage in conversations with their child at home. My written communication also helps them create an anti-bias environment in their own homes.

I know it can be overwhelming to start implementing an anti-bias curriculum in your child care setting. I suggest you take it one-step at a time. It may feel uncomfortable at first, but the more experience you have the easier it will become. You will make mistakes -- we all do. You may think about one of your comments and realize you could have said it better. You will always have a second chance. The important thing is to begin letting your children know, by what you do, that diversity

is good and prejudice is not. When my oldest children move on to kindergarten I feel confident they will be comfortable with themselves and with others. They will be confident successful learners, who also know how to be social beings, and how to speak up for themselves and others.

EXAMPLES OF FAMILY GROUP EMAILS

Example 1: This morning I introduced the new "real families" puzzle set. The kids looked at all six carefully before choosing which one they wanted to try first. Nya chose the family with a mom and dad and two children and she labeled them with her family names. Elijah chose the single mom with two children--the closest to his family. Claire chose the ones with two moms and a boy and a girl and identified them with her family names. I thought of a recent visitor who asked me "Do you really think it is necessary to have these puzzles?" (Meaning the non-traditional families). Doesn't he think Claire has a right to find a family in the puzzle set that reflects her own family, as Elijah and Nya did?

On another note, the kids have been calling each other Dr. Nance and Dr. Evans, Dr. Devaud and Dr. Swartz all day. What they have observed and studied on their visits to their own doctors is impressive--the language they use and advice they give is adorable.

Example 2: I wish I could have filmed this morning's game session. First, we played Pizza Party and Remi was completely into it and played well. Shane and Claire were in and out, as to be expected for their ages. Nya, Rahsaan and Nya loved it!! Then we moved on to RESCUE HERO where four heroes save animals from a burning Pet Hospital--another success. But the shocker for me was the way they played BOTTLES AND BINS--which is a very cooperative game about recycling and the suggested age is 5 - 8. I started out by explaining that this game was for older kids. But, when I asked if they wanted to try it, they all screamed "Yes, we can do it!" We set up the board and I passed out four tiny garbage cans, little bottles, newspapers, garbage, compost and hazardous materials. The goal is to help one another get all of their garbage and recyclables out in front of their house before the garbage and recycling truck arrives. They stuck with the game and it was so much fun. It was far beyond my expectations that we would finish it and how well they understood the concept. You may notice an interest in recycling at home. They may be a willing worker to help you sort it or suggest items to recycle.

I also read the COLORS OF US, which is about all the different shades of brown skin -including peachy tan. We put our hands together and noticed the differences, yet they were all a shade of brown. We will do more with this next week with other activities. I hope you will have time to take note of the books in the bookshelf for this week and next week regarding peace, MLK, fairness, and skin color. You are always welcome to come in and sit down to read one of the books, whenever you have time either in the morning or at pickup. Even if it is close to 5:30, as long as I am not in a hurry to leave for an appointment, I urge you to stay to read. They love it when you do and it is great for you to become familiar with the books they are reading. It is a

connection between home and child care for them. You will have a better feel for what they are discussing during the day and can be familiar with the books I include in my daily emails. 1/11/07I

Example 3: As you know, Judi started a quilt project in honor of my 30th anniversary of Bjs Kids. It will represent all of the families who shared their children with me over the years. Several alumni created their quilt squares at the celebration on Saturday. Each one is unique and special. They all make me smile, as I remember each family.

One square by a 9-year-old alumna consisted of words. When she handed it to me, my eyes filled with tears. I want to share her words with you:

I wish.....there was no more war.

I wish.....everyone was nice.

I wish...everyone had peace and love in their heart.

I wish----the earth was clean.

Dear Bjs, Thank you for inspiring me.

This was one of the many moments that evening that validated my work and made my heart sing. If your family has not created a square yet, please do. I want this quilt to TRULY represent the community who has shared their children with me. I have squares available her for pick up or I can mail you one. Thank you for participating in this project.

Love, Bjs